

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



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Vision: To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

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Healthy Babies are Worth Waiting For

Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County promotes healthy choices to reduce rates of premature births during Prematurity Awareness Month

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Port Charlotte, Fla. – Premature babies, those born before 37 weeks of pregnancy, can have serious health problems not only at birth but also later in life. Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County staff from the Growing Strong Families program were presented a proclamation of Prematurity Awareness Month at the Board of County Commissioner’s meeting on Tuesday, November 22. By raising awareness of the risk factors that can lead to premature birth, also known as preterm birth, Charlotte County women can make lifestyle changes to reduce their risk.

Babies continue to develop and grow throughout the entire pregnancy. Babies born early are at a higher risk of serious disability or death. According to the March of Dimes, in 2013, more than one third of infant deaths were due to preterm-related causes.

“Premature births cost our nation upwards of \$26.2 billion each year in expenses associated with medical care, labor and delivery costs, early intervention services, special education services, and lost work and pay,” said Dr. Frank Lepore, Administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County. “Growing Strong Families was launched in 2014 to bring registered nurses into the homes of at-risk women to educate and empower them to make healthier choices which will reduce their risk of having a premature baby as well as improve the health of their families overall.”

Preterm births in Charlotte County, percent of total births

2013 - 9.3%
2014 - 9.2%
2015 - 8.7%

In partnership with Bayfront Health Port Charlotte, Healthy Start, Healthy Families, the Baker Center, Charlotte County Transit, and Pregnancy Careline, Growing Strong Families has been able to provide needed services to sixty-five clients and their families over the past nine months, when additional staff was added to the program.

Data indicates that Charlotte County has recently improved its rate of preterm births: 8.7% of total births in 2015, down from 9.2% in 2014 and 9.3% in 2013. But these numbers are still far from ideal. The March of Dimes is working towards a nationwide goal of 8.1% or lower by 2020.

Can you reduce your risk for preterm labor and premature birth?

A woman who has had a premature baby in the past, is pregnant with multiples (twins, triplets or more), or has a problem with her uterus or cervix is most likely to have preterm labor and give birth early. However, the following are things that can be done to reduce some of the other known risk factors associated with preterm labor and premature birth:

- **Don't smoke, drink alcohol use street drugs or abuse prescription drugs.** Ask your provider about programs in your area that can help you quit.
- **Go to your first prenatal care appointment as soon as you think you're pregnant.** During pregnancy, go to all your prenatal care appointments, even if you're feeling fine. Prenatal care helps your provider make sure you and your baby are healthy.
- **Talk to your provider about your weight.** Ask how much weight you should gain during pregnancy. Try to get to a healthy weight before your next pregnancy.
- **Get treated for chronic health conditions,** like high blood pressure, diabetes and thyroid problems.
- **Protect yourself from infections.** Wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom or blowing your nose. Don't eat raw meat or fish. Have safe sex. Don't touch cat poop.
- **Reduce your stress.** Exercise and eat healthy foods. Ask for help from family and friends. Get help if your partner abuses you. Talk to your boss about how to lower your stress at work.
- **Wait at least 18 months between giving birth and getting pregnant again.** See your provider for a preconception checkup before your next pregnancy.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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